

Church uses family portraits as tool for outreach, ministry

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DALLAS—A photograph may be a frozen moment in time, but it also can have far-reaching—possibly eternal—consequences.

Austin Mann, a photographer and member of the [Village Church in Flower Mound](#), enjoys using his photography skills to help various ministries. He had traveled with [Park Cities Baptist Church](#) in Dallas to Guatemala, where he used his camera to chronicle the church's ministry there.

Volunteers from Park Cities Church in Dallas set up eight portrait studios at Cornerstone Baptist Church in inner-city Dallas and took photos of about 300 families

When a fellow photographer told Mann he had taken pictures of underprivileged people for the Salvation Army and described what a fulfilling experience it had been, Mann asked staff at Park Cities if they could use his skills in a similar fashion.

Park Cities has a history of almost 30 years of ministry cooperation with [Cornerstone Baptist Church](#) in inner-city Dallas. Volunteers from Park Cities have assisted Cornerstone in its ministry to the homeless and holiday feeding ministries, and the churches also join together for a school mentoring program and a clothing ministry.

About \$70,000 each year in the Park Cities budget, as well as about \$30,000 in designated gifts, is directed to Cornerstone.

Naturally, when Mann asked for a place to use his skills, Cornerstone came

to mind.



"For many, it was the first time they ever had a photo of their child that was maybe 3 or 4 years old," said photographer Austin Mann.

On a Friday evening, Mann and a group of photographers he assembled for the project set up eight portrait studios at Cornerstone and the next day took pictures of about 300 families.

"It was a neat way to bring families together," Mann said. "We found that there were a number of families who hadn't been in the same room together for many years. It turned into a lot of mini family reunions. There were mothers there with sons they had not seen in years."

Mann also felt blessed to take photos of some families with young children.

"For many, it was the first time they ever had a photo of their child that was maybe 3 or 4 years old," he said. "For a lot of us, we take hundreds of photos before the baby even leaves the hospital, but for these families, this was their first picture ever."

He particularly remembered a mother who had a picture of her 20-year-old son when he was 2 years old, but there had not been a photo taken during those intervening 18 years.



Thirteen of the families who had their photographs taken joined the church the next Sunday.

“It was kind of mind-blowing and neat for all the photographers involved. It was a cool way for the photographers to use the talents and equipment God had given them to give back a little bit,” Mann said of the six-hour photo shoot.

While it represented a nice gift from Cornerstone to its community, Pastor Chris Simmons said the church also was on the receiving end. Thirteen of the families who had their photographs taken joined the church the next Sunday.

“It removed a barrier to some who thought lightning would strike if they ever entered a church,” Simmons said. About half of the families who had their pictures taken had no affiliation with the church, he noted.

“It was a very successful outreach,” he said. “And since we captured their contact information, names and addresses, when they had their pictures taken, we are still following up on some of them. And we still have people visiting and joining. I see it having a very long-term impact on our church and community.”

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Volunteers set up a family photo
shoot at Cornerstone Baptist
Church.